



## **PILOTS MAKE LONG COMMUTE TO GLOBAL HAWK UNIVERSITY**

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**SOUTHWEST ASIA** — For Global Hawk pilots, training is a little like going to a university with a large main campus and an extension campus a few miles away — make that half a world away.

While that is one heck of a commute, it's necessary because the Global Hawk, an unmanned aerial vehicle used to provide real-time imagery, comes in very limited numbers.

"Everybody comes qualified to a deployed location, right?" said Maj. Ed Maraist, 12th Expeditionary Reconnaissance Squadron detachment commander. "Not us. This is the only place we fly the Global Hawk, so we bring out people who haven't qualified and train them here."

The syllabus for training consists of 18 simulator rides and three launch and recovery flights. Pilots wrap up with an initial check ride, which qualifies them to do take offs and landings, but not missions.

"We do the take offs and landings

here, but the mission is flown by crewmembers back at Beale (Air Force Base, Calif.)," Major Maraist said. "We hand off the plane about 1.5 hours into the sortie, they fly the entire mission, hand it back to us, and we bring it in for landing."

The major said the process, called reach-back, helps reduce the number of personnel and the amount of equipment and support that would need to be shipped here to support the Global Hawk mission.

"We do it this way because we can," he said, **"You want as small a footprint as possible in theater, and as long as we have the ability to fly to anywhere in the world from anywhere in the world, why take resources from the home base and bring them here?"**

When pilots complete training here, they return to Beale for mission-related training and, ironically, a continuation of their deployment.

"We're a detachment from our home unit, but the interesting thing is that the squadron, as a whole, is attached to the 380th AEW," the major said. "When our guys finish here, they

are not finished with their deployment. They are basically forward deploying to another 380th AEW site at Beale."

Global Hawks are flown by Air Force pilots or navigators who hold a commercial pilot's instrument rating. But, unlike manned aircraft that use stick and rudder, the Global Hawk is flown by keyboard and mouse.

"The airplane flies itself," the major said. "We direct it and tell it where to go. My kids are jealous that I get to play a video game for a job."

While the job is fun, it's also serious. **The Global Hawk mission supports the Air Force, Department of Defense and most of the U.S. national security and intelligence gathering agencies.**

"Our mission is getting an assigned picture to a user in a minimal amount of time," Major Maraist said. "We're doing that, and breaking a lot of ground in the way intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance is gathered."

Apparently, the commute is worth it.